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**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Bird Infected with West Nile Virus Discovered in Gooding County**

A magpie in Gooding County has tested positive for West Nile virus, the first evidence of the virus in south-central Idaho. This is the first infected bird discovered in the state.

“We have seen West Nile infections in southwest Idaho and eastern Oregon in horses in recent weeks, and we are now seeing it in other areas of our state,” says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, Idaho Deputy State Epidemiologist. “This case indicates the virus is present in a broader area of the state, so people need to take precautions to protect themselves and their families from mosquito bites.” West Nile virus is spread through the bite of an infected mosquito. West Nile virus is not contagious; people cannot contract the virus from contact with infected animals or people.

The magpie was collected by the South Central District Health Department as part of an ongoing surveillance effort to detect the virus. So far this year, 69 birds have been tested for the virus in Idaho. In other states, birds have been an indicator of the spread of West Nile virus activity. Detecting the virus early in birds gives public health officials an opportunity to alert the public to avoid mosquito bites.

Tengelsen says that most people infected with West Nile virus are asymptomatic or will only have a mild flu-like illness. Common symptoms of infection include headaches, body aches and a mild fever. But the virus can lead to serious illness requiring hospitalization, especially in people over the age of 50.

**(more)**

With this discovery, Tengelsen advises people to take these precautions:

- Insect-proof your home by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on your property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk;
- Report dead birds to your local District Health Department or Fish and Game office.

West Nile virus is particularly virulent for certain species of birds, including corvids and raptors. Corvids includes magpies, ravens, crows and jays. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game also has been working with the Department of Health and Welfare for the past two years in West Nile surveillance efforts in birds. “We have expected to discover the virus in our bird populations for some time,” says Dr. Mark Drew, Fish and Game Wildlife Veterinarian. “In some areas of the country West Nile virus has severely impacted crow populations, so we will be closely studying its impact here on our wild birds, and continue to work with the health department to promote public health.”

There is not a vaccine available for people, but there is a vaccine for horses. Approximately one-third of unvaccinated horses that contract West Nile infection die. Horse owners are encouraged to contact their veterinarian for more information about the vaccine.

For health information about West Nile virus, please contact your district health department, or visit Health and Welfare’s website at: [www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov](http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov). For information about protecting your horse, contact your local veterinarian, or visit the Department of Agriculture website at [www.agri.idaho.gov](http://www.agri.idaho.gov). The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has helpful West Nile information at: [http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/manage\\_issues/wnv/surveillance.cfm](http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/manage_issues/wnv/surveillance.cfm)

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**(Editors: For more information please contact Tom Shanahan at 208-334-0668.)**